

Article

# Assessing the Impacts of Internal Communication: Employer Branding and Human Resources

Raquel Fernandes <sup>1</sup>, Bruno Barbosa Sousa <sup>1,2,3,\*</sup> , Manuel Fonseca <sup>3,4</sup>  and José Oliveira <sup>5</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Polytechnic Institute of Cávado and Ave (IPCA), Campus IPCA, 4750-810 Barcelos, Portugal; raquel\_a.\_fernandes@hotmail.com

<sup>2</sup> CiTUR—Centre for Tourism Research, Development and Innovation, Polytechnic University of Leiria, 2411-901 Leiria, Portugal

<sup>3</sup> UNIAG—The Applied Management Research Unit, Campus de Santa Apolónia, 5300-253 Bragança, Portugal

<sup>4</sup> Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo (IPVC), Rua Escola Industrial e Comercial Nun'Álvares, 34, 4900-347 Viana do Castelo, Portugal

<sup>5</sup> REMIT—Research on Economics, Management and Information Technologies, University Portucalense, 4200-072 Porto, Portugal

\* Correspondence: bsousa@ipca.pt

**Abstract:** Human capital is considered the most important resource in any organization. However, most companies are concerned with external customer satisfaction, without devoting much attention to the satisfaction of their employees. Indisputably, employee satisfaction is fundamental and determines the success or failure of what the customer experiences. Technological developments have changed our lives and habits, and even the way we relate to others, so the online increasingly influences the offline. The purpose of this manuscript was to examine the relationship between the Digital Communication of companies and their Employer Branding, with a special focus on the close relationship that employees feel with the company. To perform this analysis, a case study was carried out using a qualitative approach. Interviews with seven managers from three different companies, two of whom are responsible for the Digital Communication of their organizations, were performed. With the analysis of the data obtained, it is concluded that the Employer Branding perceived by the employees is of a positive image of the company, but they do not feel emotionally more connected with the organization through the Digital Communication practiced by it. With this study, it is expected that organizations recognize the importance that an online presence has in the image of their brand as a whole, and that it is important to invest in Digital Communication, but it has to be performed with an action plan to achieve the objectives intended. From an interdisciplinary perspective, the manuscript presents insights for marketing (digital marketing and employer branding) and for socially responsible behavior by organizations (in a Portuguese context).

**Keywords:** employer branding; digital communication; social media; social responsibility



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## 1. Introduction

Cheese et al. (2008) argues that talent is an embracing term that describes the human resources that organizations want to attract, retain, and develop to achieve their business objectives. Additionally, for Monteiro et al. (2020), talent is the set of ideas, knowledge, and skills that had the potential to produce more using the same available resources. Hence, talent represents the set of knowledge, skills, and experience that an employee has and are reflected in his or her work. According to Monteiro et al. (2020), employer branding is the concept used to define an entity's reputation as an employer and the value that employees can derive from it. It is essential that organizations stand out from competitors, and for this it is necessary that they can retain and attract the desired talents (Lissaneddine et al. 2021; Ivančević and Vlastelica 2022).

The development of each organization's employer branding becomes essential since we currently face a talent retention problem (Aggerholm et al. 2011; Ilyas et al. 2018; Kashive et al. 2020). Companies have to focus on creating a good working environment with good conditions to offer, and then work on communication that disseminates this message, not just for employees but also for potential future candidates (Vatsa 2016; Wei et al. 2022). For instance, and according to Cahyadi et al. (2022), job satisfaction is a consequence of leadership styles and human resource management practices (HRMPs). So, job satisfaction is a mediator in the relationship between SLSs and employee performance and between HRMPs and employee performance.

Social networks are the new stage for Employer Branding strategies, and they are a way to make the company's project known to an external audience that otherwise would not be aware of the organizational culture (Carpentier et al. 2019). Therefore, this manuscript intends to understand the impact between Digital Communication and Employer Branding from the perspective of current employees, and to understand whether this type of communication creates a greater emotional connection between the company and the employee.

Six objectives were defined to be achieved with this study, and on which the main considerations of this manuscript will be drawn, these are: 1. To understand how the company's strategies in digital communication have an impact on the image it transmits to its workers; 2. Briefly describe the concepts inherent to Employer Branding and Digital Communication; 3. Realize how the organizational communication of the companies under study can work as an instrument of approximation to employees; 4. Understand to what extent Digital Communication can be a management tool in companies; 5. Identify the identity and positioning of the respective brands in the context of the market in which it operates; 6. Suggest how better communication techniques/Digital Marketing strategy can be developed in companies.

In order to draw conclusions from these objectives, the following research hypotheses were defined: Proposition 1: Digital Communication practiced by companies creates a close relationship with employees; Proposition 2: In a smaller company, publications create a greater connection with employees; Proposition 3: Digital Communication is understood as a management tool in companies.

In this study, three companies were analyzed, two of which are small and the third is a large company with a national presence. The instrument used to carry out this study was the semi-structured interview. Thus, seven managers were interviewed: two from company A, three from company B, and two from company C. Within the subjects chosen for the study, we have two people who are responsible for Digital Communication in their organizations (companies A and B); all others are employees who give their perspective on how they understand their company's Employer Branding. What is the importance that internal marketing and digital communication develop in the emotional connection that employees feel with the brand (and employer)? What is the reinforcement of this situation in the (post) pandemic context?

The structure of this study is divided into five sections. First, we have the current section which is the Introduction. Here, the framework of the study is described, what motivated the chosen theme, its objective and the hypotheses to be tested, the methodology, and the structure of the manuscript.

The second part is the theoretical framework, where the basic concepts inherent in this study are analyzed. In this section, a review of the scientific literature is carried out in order to deepen the fundamental subjects of this investigation, which are: Employer Branding, Digital Communication, and Social Networks.

Then we have the analysis of the methodology used in this study. In this section we analyze the objectives and hypotheses of the study and the methodology used. The fourth section is the analysis and discussion of results. This section contains a description of the companies under analysis and the interviewees who participated in the study. It also presents the results of the interviews, what can be concluded from each excerpt, and how it

applies to our study. Good examples of Employer Branding and Digital Communication from each of the companies are also exposed. Finally, the conclusions of this study are presented, along with points of improvement in the Digital Communication of these companies, the limitations of the study, and suggestions for future studies.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Employer Branding

Human capital is considered the most important resource in any organization. However, most companies are concerned with external customer satisfaction, without devoting much attention to the satisfaction of their employees. Indisputably, employee satisfaction is fundamental and determines the success or failure of what the customer experiences (Veloso et al. 2021b; Verčič 2021). According to Berthon et al. (2005), for any company to succeed, it is essential to be able to attract good professionals. Recent studies (i.e., Cahyadi et al. 2022) have revealed how leadership styles and HRMPs improve employee performance in companies. Furthermore, job satisfaction is a consequence of leadership styles and HRMPs. So, job satisfaction is a mediator in the relationships between sustainable leadership styles (SLSs) and employee performance and between HRMPs and employee performance.

One of the essential elements in building employer branding is employer attractiveness. Monteiro et al. (2020) defines attractiveness as the benefits that a potential employee expects to gain from working in a specific organization. Employer Branding develops the corporate brand and places the firm on a level where it is seen as an attractive company in the market; it also creates a strong relationship with qualified candidates, allowing them to be recruited and retained in the organization (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Messini 2022). The term Employer Branding is still quite recent; as mentioned by (Vatsa 2016), it was first used by Barrow in 1990 in one of his conferences. This is because the term “Branding/Brand” was used for tangible things, “a brand can be defined as a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these that is intended to identify the goods and services of a seller or a group of sellers and differentiate them from competitors” (Pirić et al. 2018, p. 31); over time, this concept of distinguishing a “brand” began to be applied not only to products, but also to people, places, and companies. As referred to by Pirić et al. (2018), we have to distinguish three different concepts, which are Product Branding, Corporate Branding, and Employer Branding: the first is how the consumer sees the product, the second is how the company is seen before different external auditors, and finally Employer Branding, which is how the company is considered as an employer. Yacine and Karjaluo (2022) report that the biggest difference between the three concepts is the public to which they are addressed, as while the first two concepts are intended for people outside the company, Employer Branding is intended for an external audience, which are the possible candidates, but also to an internal audience, which are existing employees. The main objective is to attract new talent, making the company more competitive, but its role is to ensure that all employees understand, respect, and act in accordance with the company’s values and objectives.

Cahyadi et al. (2022) argue that employee job satisfaction is a sequence of psychology. The level of employee job satisfaction increases depending on their job. Scholars have justified that job satisfaction is a psychological evaluation material. Employee job satisfaction intrinsically refers to the performed job and the tasks performed by the employee. Extrinsically, scholars have acknowledged that employee job satisfaction refers to the desired recognition, compensation, promotion, salary, rewards, work associations, and work components. Employer Branding reflects its value proposition for its workers, so the company benefits from this concept when it is seen as a great workplace by its employees and by important stakeholders (groups of interest to the company; investors, employees, and customers) in the foreign market (Aggerholm et al. 2011; Yasin et al. 2023). A good work environment does not come out of nowhere, but rather as a result of a set of strategies developed to attract, commit, and retain employees. However, the employer brand cannot be controlled by the organization, as it is the employee’s perspective, and if their experience

in the organizational culture and the company's values correspond to expectations, this is what will determine the value of the brand in the future market (Sandeepanie et al. 2023). For an organization to have the ability to recruit potentially talented employees, it needs, as an employer, to develop a strong brand in the market (Graeme et al. 2005; Pavitra 2018; Monteiro et al. 2020; Pandita 2021). According to Moroko and Uncles (2008), companies, by betting on employer branding, manage to get the best out of their employees, making the goals attainable, while perpetuating the employer's successful brand through talent (Monteiro et al. 2020; Kucherov et al. 2022). Accordingly, companies that want to be successful should invest in their employer branding. Sullivan (2004) states that it is essential that employer branding contains eight elements: (1) a culture of sharing and continuous improvement; (2) a balance between good management and high productivity; (3) obtaining public recognition; (4) proactive employees; (5) "being spoken of"; (6) being a benchmark company; (7) increasing candidates' perception of the organization's good practices; (8) utilizing brand assessment metrics. Therefore, and according to Monteiro et al. (2020), organizations that have an employer value proposition plan are more likely to retain and attract talent, making it easier for the company to achieve its goals. In addition, the employer value proposition also influences the commitment of employees, improving hiring quality and helping to reduce employee turnover in organizations.

## 2.2. Digital Marketing and Social Responsibility

Several researchers report that digital marketing and consumer satisfaction with the brand is a prerequisite for brand love to be developed (Drennan et al. 2015; Palusuk et al. 2019; Rodrigues et al. 2023). According to Rodrigues et al. (2023), consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand in a long-term relationship and have a passionate desire to continue using and interacting with the brand will be more proactive in defending it and recommending it to others. With the spread of computers and information technologies, marketing began to shift its attention to the internet, giving rise to digital marketing. The internet has become a communication tool, especially to reach consumers who use it as a means of obtaining information and communicating (Soares and Oliveira 2018). With the digital context, there is a communicational revolution, because this new support allows an even broader transmission of information than we are used to. Looking at the history of information media, we can see that we evolved from stone (rock paintings), to wood, and to paper (initially papyrus). For the start mass of communication, the most important thing was paper, which boosted the emergence of the press, and which, with printing techniques, allowed the storage and transmission of information. Now, in the digital age, we have an unimaginable capacity to store, manipulate, and transmit information, which revolutionizes the communication medium (Mainieri 2011). With globalization and the new digital communication, we see a change of roles in which mass communication is no longer used and people begin to favor interpersonal communication as well as mere spectators and they begin to be co-producers. Digital marketing takes advantage of the power of connectivity to create a new type of communication and relationship with consumers, interactive marketing (Soares and Oliveira 2018). With the new information technologies, there is another type of consumer expectations, and it is not only in relation to personalized products, but also for personalized relationships. Thus, it is expected that companies adopt a more proactive posture and where users are responsible for how the relationship is established. The new consumer is not looking for the lowest price, but an experience (Soares and Monteiro 2015). For Soares and Oliveira (2018), in the digital age, the customer is the one who dictates the rules, which requires constant innovation from companies, which have to look for ways to create lasting relationships through the internet (developing a safe and reliable environment). We have to distinguish between traditional and digital communication, and the changes that have occurred with this transition. Traditional communication is all communication expression originating from printed, electronic, and audiovisual media, while digital is all that comes from the internet or uses it as a platform for action. The big change that occurs with this new type of

communication is that it previously focused on the transmission of the message at the sender, and digital communication allows interaction and the exchange of roles between senders and receivers (Mateus 2013). Digital marketing promotes collaboration (dialog between the parties) and adds databases to traditional marketing, with both aspects valued as interactions occur (Monteiro et al. 2020). At the same time, digital communication is (progressively) related to corporate social responsibility. Companies can (and should) use digital channels to promote social responsibility in organizations. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which several organizations used digital media to promote socially responsible isolation and hygiene behaviors (da Silva Pereira and Sousa 2020; Veloso et al. 2021a). Now, in matters of internal marketing (and endomarketing) digital communication can also promote socially responsible behavior (e.g., gender equality, fighting against racial discrimination, employment for people with disabilities, sustainability, waste reduction, or even pet-friendly organizations).

According to Monteiro et al. (2020), the recruiter's behavior or recruitment activities are related to the perception of the employer's characteristics. Talent in organizations means people, those who get involved, think, interpret, evaluate, decide, act, and lead the organization in this new era, where knowledge has become the most important resource, an intangible and invisible wealth fundamental to success (Ehrhart and Ziegert 2005). It is possible to establish a relationship between digital practices (i.e., digital communication), employer branding and socially responsible (organizational) attitudes (attitudes that promote employee well-being, talent retention, and employee loyalty with feelings of belonging).

### 3. Methodology

In the empirical component of this work, a qualitative analysis method was used. More specifically, for the analysis of communication content, it is considered to be the most appropriate technique for this type of research (Wagner et al. 2023). The present manuscript began by analyzing secondary data by carrying out a literature review, which is essential to create a knowledge base to better understand the topic and to be able to move on to the collection of primary data that will be the interviews (Sousa and Baptista 2011).

"Qualitative research is characterized by being unstructured, exploratory in nature and based on small samples, and may use well-known qualitative techniques, such as focus groups (group interviews), word associations (asking respondents to indicate their first answers to words of encouragement) and in-depth interviews (individual interviews that probe in detail the thoughts of respondents)" (Malhotra 2012, p. 36). Semi-structured interview: "Using interviews can help you obtain valid and reliable data relevant to your research questions and objectives" (Saunders et al. 2007, p. 310). The interview is a data collection technique where, through an oral conversation, with carefully selected people, and with a well-defined purpose, an attempt will be made to outline the point of view of the interviewed subject (Sousa and Baptista 2011). The data from the interviews must be recorded in writing, reduced so that they can be processed later (Lessard-Hébert et al. 2012).

The main characteristics of the interviews are the greater efficiency of response, a direct interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, the active role of the interviewer and the opportunity to deepen the theme (Sousa and Baptista 2011). Some of the advantages are greater flexibility for the researcher who can apply the interview to any segment of the population, adapting the formulation of the questions to each of the groups; it also allows the interviewer to observe attitudes, reactions, and conduct during the interview. The interview structure to be applied was a semi-structured form, since there was a script to be followed, but grants freedom to the interviewee without deviating from the theme. The guide is composed of open questions that provide greater detail, making the interview more interesting for the interviewer and facilitating answers to the interviewee (Sousa and Baptista 2011). Unstructured interviews allow the interviewer, through conversation, to obtain data that can be used in qualitative analysis, managing to select what is important to

resolve the initial question. The purpose of this manuscript was to examine the relationship between the Digital Communication of companies and their Employer Branding, with a special focus on the close relationship that employees feel with the company. To perform this analysis, a case study was carried out using a qualitative approach through interviews with seven (Portuguese) managers from three different (Portuguese) companies, two of whom are responsible for the Digital Communication of their organizations. From the analysis of the data obtained, it is concluded that the Employer Branding perceived by the employees is of a positive image of the company, but they do not feel emotionally more connected with the organization through the Digital Communication practiced by it. The interview script was “semi-structured” and was completed with a set of questions that will be presented briefly. The interviews conducted were all subject to the recording and transcription process after the “consent of the informed” was signed by all interviewees in this investigation process. The interview script (semi-structured) to the various interviewees (company guardians) was defined as follows (on average, each interview lasted 45 min realized by videoconference (the Zoom platform)): (1) Which one interprets to be an identification and posting of your brand without market context in which you insert? How do you differentiate yourself? (2) What type of employer wants a company? (3) Oh your company is to attract potential employees? (4) Oh your company is to remove your employees? (5) Do you interpret digital communication as a management instrument in the company? (6) Is your company presenting on social networks? (7) What objectives does a company want to achieve with the use of social networks? Are these goals corresponded? (8) How often the company remains active on social networks, that is, through publications, page updates, maintenance, etc.? Do you think this frequency is appropriate? (9) What kind of content/activities does a company developed on social networks? (10) Is there any kind of strategy presents in the company’s actions on social networks? If there is, what does it consist of? (11) How is your company communicates as your branding messages within the organization? And out? (12) How is what the sukay measures the employer’s brand?

Structured interviews have a questionnaire with pre-determined and standardized questions with pre-coded answers. The social interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee is very basic, as the former has to read the questions exactly as they were written and always in the same tone so as not to demonstrate his opinion. Unstructured interviews are not standardized, as the interviewer has a list of topics and questions to be addressed, although they may vary from one interview to another. Thus, depending on the flow of the conversation, the questionnaire can always be adapted and changed (Saunders et al. 2007). The (seven) managers were selected due to the deep (practical) knowledge about digital communication in Portuguese companies where they are inserted. Naturally, this may represent a sample limitation. However, considering the diversity of companies (sector of activity, geographical location, and inserted business), we consider that managers can represent any of this diversity for planning Digital Communication and Employer Branding in the context of business in Portugal.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Within the organizations under study, there are three distinct realities that give us a broad view of this topic. Company A, which is a micro-enterprise, since it has less than 10 employees; Company B, which is considered a small company; and Company C, which, even though it does not know the exact number of employees, knows that there are thousands and that is why it is a big company.

The markets in which they operate are also quite different. Company A with its co-workspace business is local, as it is linked to the place where the company is located; with the Digital Marketing Training School it can expand, if it is online, but in face-to-face training, it is again limited to your region. Company B works with manual arts and therefore can work for national and international clients, and it is in a market that does not have much competition because it is very specific. In the case of Company C, it is a company that works nationally in the field of telecommunications, but with an

international presence as well. Seven people were interviewed, belonging to the three companies, two of which are responsible for the Digital Communication of the companies and gave a perspective of the strategy that the company has in approaching social networks. The other five interviewees are company employees who bring a perspective on how the organization's Digital Communication impacts them.

The three companies where the interviews were carried out and are the subject of this study are very different in size and in the market in which they operate. Being faced with a large company, where we do not have the perspective of the company and only two of its employees, and two SMEs where we managed to have both perspectives and managed to better understand the point of view of the company and its employee. Interviewee 1 states that at Company A, the main characteristic that distinguishes them is informality. This applies in the approach with customers, but also in the digital communication they apply. As they target a younger age group, they want to attract people with less corporate communication and create a feeling of greater proximity. The person responsible for company B believes that her company is distinguished by quality and meeting deadlines, but above all the humanization of the business, with the perspective that the customers' problems are also her problems.

Interviewee 6 believes that company C is well recognized as a workplace, and also by its customers. As an employer, she points out that she has colleagues who came from competing companies in the market because they preferred to go to work there, not for monetary reasons, but because they saw that as a better company to work for. She also believes that customers have a positive idea of the company, placing it as the best and as being innovative. Interviewee 7, however, states that the company is recognized by customers as being of quality and trust, and obtains this feedback by working closely with customers.

Interviewee 1 recognizes the importance of Digital Communication and sees it as a management tool in her company. Besides the co-working business, company A invested in a Digital Marketing school, which is why it recognizes the great importance that this represents in today's business. To support companies that use their spaces, they have even created these courses to help increase digital literacy. For the co-working space, they have a very specific audience of entrepreneurs who have started their own business and who need a place to work, so it is much easier to attract customers with online campaigns aimed at their target audience. The person responsible for company B believes that Digital Communication is essential. In her organization, she uses Digital Communication to show the work they develop and eliminate any prejudices that may exist in relation to their industry.

In the case of Company A, it has a presence in five social networks, namely: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Google My Business. Interviewee 1 states that her presence on Google My Business and Pinterest is a strategic issue to work on indexing. The first social network on which they were present was Facebook, and despite having a decrease in interactions, they continue to have good results with ads, which is why they have not given up investing in this one. On Instagram, they see good results with organic interactions and they believe that it is the social network that works best at the moment. On LinkedIn, they believe it is a good bet for advertising the Escola de Marketing Digital, and not so much for co-working spaces. It works well organically, if we consider that it is a social network made to advertise ourselves in the world of work and therefore attracts people who want to gain new skills and grow professionally. Your online presence aims to sell your services, even if indirectly. Mainly for the co-working space, they try to sell the experience that is lived in their space. They are portrayed on social networks as a relaxed and fun space, which makes people feel like going to work there, achieving their goals through indirect sales.

They publish every day on the two topics (the co-working space and the Digital Marketing Academy), but they think that the frequency is high and they want to reduce it to just talking about one topic each day, or reduce it even more to achieve increase

interaction on each post and not saturate users with too many posts. The type of content they publish is based on photographs and videos of people. Through the stories, they ask questions to better understand the needs of the users, and also create a greater connection. They also create content about Braga, but which has nothing to do with the company itself, but even with events that take place in the city, which helps the page to gain visibility. They also create a lot of educational and informative content that, in addition to helping the user, also makes the page grow as they gain more interactions. They try to make digital communication uniform, as more than one team member can handle publications.

Company B did not plan to start its presence on social networks, but uses the platforms of Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. As Interviewee 3 uses Facebook more on a personal level, it is easier to publish content for the business account on that platform, but prefers the type of communication practiced on LinkedIn, even understanding that it does not have as much impact as other social networks, even the level of a more general public and not at a professional level. With the use of social networks, she intends to gain more visibility and become known to the public by showing what the company is like, the environment we live in and the values we defend, always being honest and showing what we believe in. They are present online weekly, and try to have a publication at least every two days, even believing that the ideal regularity would be daily. They recognize the importance that Digital Marketing currently has in society and therefore it is an important way to represent companies. The type of content they publish involves showing the inside of the company, the work they carry out and even demystifying the prejudices that exist around what a handicraft company is, and educating users about the possibilities achieved with their work. There is beginning to be greater importance attributed to planning the communication made on social networks, and making it a day-to-day task for the company.

According to Interviewee 2, there is no digital communication designed for internal customers. If we think that the company's objectives for the use of social networks were to make sales, it is clear that the focus is different. Even by using the employees as models for the photos, demonstrating that there is a relaxed and light atmosphere, the objective is to sell the services, and the employees do not feel a greater connection with the company, because entering the photos for them is work and not an instrument of rapprochement with the company. Even though she has fun creating the content for social media, she does not feel that she is more connected to the organization because of it. Interviewee 4 recognizes the importance of using online communication tools that facilitate communication within the company. She mentions applications such as Zoom or WhatsApp that encourage closer communication between employees, even when they are physically distant. Even though she defends that communication cannot be just online, she thinks that it creates a closer relationship with the company.

## 5. Conclusions

The 21st century brought the greatest transformation since the industrial revolution. In this moment of change, the first and most important shift is to attract, develop, and retain talent, namely digital talent (Crişan and Borţun 2017); talent from Millennials or Generation Y (Arriscado et al. 2019). Each generation is characterized in various contexts, and so far, the researchers' focus was often on identifying differences between selected age groups (Ramachandiran and Dhanapal 2018). However, it should be emphasized that the youngest generation in the employment market has not been described in as much detail as other generations (Rzemieniak and Wawer 2021). According to Münch et al. (2022), perception theory helps to explain the findings in this research in terms of the characteristics of digital marketing communication and advertising that has the potential to effectively capture the attention of the Millennials and Generation Z consumer to the point where it has a chance to influence their behavior. This research also adds to the literature on Millennial and Generation Z consumer behavior as distracted digital natives, in terms of the characteristics of digital marketing communication and advertising that will not only hold their attention but will also be interpreted authentically. Previous studies have been carried out that

relate the impacts of internal communication (employer branding and human resources), for example, Špoljarić and Tkalac Verčič (2022). However, our manuscript seems to be innovative in the relationship established between the (post) pandemic context and changes in the Portuguese (and European) economy.

Dynamic changes to market, economic, demographic, social, technological, and environmental processes occurring in communities and organizations are combined with a growing demand for employees with a broad set of hard skills connected strictly with their practiced professions but also, primarily, displaying expected types of behavior and professing specific values (Abdelmoteleb 2020; Rzemieniak and Wawer 2021; Van Buren 2022). According to Rzemieniak and Wawer (2021), contemporary organizations owe their competitive position largely to the potential of their employees. Recruiting employees and engaging them in the performance of the company's objectives is one of the key factors enabling it to effectively compete on the market. Creating an attractive image of the employer is beginning to play a significant role in management (Silva et al. 2021; Yu et al. 2022).

In order to draw conclusions from this study, we have to approach the two realities studied here differently. On the one hand, we have the perspective of micro and small companies, and on the other hand, we have a large company; both approach the issue of Employer Branding in a different way. Small companies are only known in their geographic environment, and even there it is sometimes difficult to make known the values and ideologies of the organization, as well as its organizational environment. This creates a challenge to attract new talent, because they may not even know the company, or just know the name and business area, but this does not allow it to become a prominent brand as an employer. Thus, in order to stand out and make known the organizational environment of the company, they must use social networks and publish publications that show what it is like to work there. It is essential to create a strategy for the use of social networks, as they need to know what goals they want to achieve, use the available metrics to be able to analyze the results, adapt the strategy, and manage to maintain the consistency that is essential for a good online presence. If you want to create a good Employer Branding through social networks, you have to use publications that show the workplace, that portray the organizational environment, make the organization's values visible, make publications that value employees, and recognize them publicly.

Thus, when taking into account the objectives set out above, it appears that Digital Communication and the use of social networks is currently a management tool in these companies. They recognize the increasing importance that this represents and that it has to become a day-to-day task for companies. They have a presence in more than one social network, and plan their use and the objectives to be achieved with them.

The use of social networks and Digital Communication as a tool to approach employees does not work for the most part. In companies A and B, which used more publications where employees appear, and especially in company B, which mentions employees a lot and how vital they are to the company, the interviewees did not see a greater connection to the company resulting from this type of communication. In the case of company C, despite having a very strong online presence, but without references to employees, interviewees 6 and 7 believed in having a greater connection with the company because of publications on social networks. This shows that even with small companies favoring this type of communication, as employees are generally involved in the creation of this content, it no longer creates in them a feeling of closeness to the company, while in the case of large companies, as they have a large national representativeness, employees can feel more connected with the company because in their day-to-day they do not experience this closeness and social networks can be a means of unity.

The best Digital Communication techniques that can be applied by companies involves publishing with a focus on Employer Branding and not on selling your product/service. Company A uses employees a lot in publications, portrays a relaxed atmosphere with publications with a humorous nature, but although employees serve as models, the focus is not on them, but on sales. Understanding that companies have sales as their purpose to

grow, it can be beneficial for the brand to portray an employee appreciation post, or just to demonstrate the work environment experienced in the organization so that the feed is not only based on sales as this does not attract customers who want to know and expect more from companies. Thus, favoring publications with the aim of portraying a good Employer Branding has positive effects on employees, potential employees, and even customers. Company B, in contrast, publishes material that recognizes the value of its employees, but should create a Digital Communication follow-up strategy, understanding the objectives behind each publication, the metrics that can be improved, and the audiences it wants to reach; as well as creating a good balance between the number of posts focused on sales and focused on Employer Branding. Company C, as it has a strong brand and prefers to separate the type of content it publishes, creating a separate social network focused on employees' careers, could benefit from creating some content (even if only a little) referring to the benefits of working in the company, or even referring to the importance of employees to the functioning of the organization on your main account. Thus, it is considered that this study was able to capture three different realities of the Portuguese market and demonstrate the importance of Digital Communication in Employer Branding. The capture of both perspectives stands out, making the study more complete by seeing how companies interpret the planning of the use of social networks and how employees see the company portrayed online. The constraints of this work were due to the COVID-19 pandemic that made it difficult to meet with the interviewees and therefore all interviews were carried out through the Zoom platform. In the future, one aspect to improve in this work would be to have the perspective of a medium or large company and to contrast the way they approach Digital Communication compared to small companies. In addition, one aspect that would enrich this work would be to interview people outside the institutions who follow their work on social networks and analyze their perspective of the Employer Branding of these companies.

After content analysis of the employer branding literature review it can be inferred that when developed in an SME, employer branding directly and effectively contributes to the evolution and progress of the business, both economically and in talent selection, becoming a competitive advantage in view of competitors (Otken and Okan 2016; Monteiro et al. 2020). As stated by Santos et al. (2019), what employees say, think, and communicate about their companies is essential to organizational success. This research has made it possible to strengthen the importance of employer branding in the management of human resources in SMEs, as there are numerous advantages and benefits that can result from it, namely the attraction and retention of talent. This new theoretical model aims to support SMEs in the talent recruitment and retention phase. Using the questionnaire as a support tool for the proposed model, SMEs will be able to obtain information (data/results) to analyze and implement an employer branding strategy suitable to the organization, and consequently decreasing their respective employee turnover while attracting the desired talent.

The present research has some limitations. The sample size is, naturally, small and does not allow the results to be generalized. The study was developed in the pandemic context and data collection was affected by the context of isolation (COVID-19). Future studies should make it possible to generalize results, through focus groups (company employees). However, the results obtained seem to show a predominant importance of digital media to promote employer branding and, consequently, to promote socially responsible practices (at the organizational level). It is also suggested to develop studies of a quantitative nature that allow establishing causal relationships between study variables. Specifically, it will be intended to understand the relationship established between digital channels (i.e., digital communication) and the promotion of employer branding and corporate social responsibility. It is therefore suggested to develop a conceptual model and structural equation models (using AMOS or PLS) to empirically test causality relationships (for example, continuing the model developed by Santos et al. 2019).

According to Münch et al. (2022), several characteristics of effective digital marketing communication and advertising emerged from this research. Future research will use quantitative methods to assess which characteristics of this stimuli contribute most to Millennial and Generation Z perception of digital marketing communication and advertising in specific marketing contexts (Dabija et al. 2018). Moreover, future on research will quantify which combination of these characteristics will be the most influential to Millennial and Generation Z consumer behavior. According to Santos et al. (2019), we may thus represent employer branding in the following conceptualization, as a multidimensional construct:  $EB = f(OC, CS, CR, RS)$  subject to EC, PA, RCE, RFE where: EB = Employer branding Will be a function of: OC = Organizational culture, CS = Company strategy, CR = Company reputation, RS = Reward systems, Subject to: EC = Employee communication, PA = Proximity area (where the firm is located), RCE = Reputation of current employees, RFE = Reputation of former employees. Employer branding will be driven by OC, CS, CR, and R; and be subject to EC, PA, RCE, and RFE. Hence, an effective employer branding model, applied to SMEs, will also depend on employee communication (what employees say about the company), where the firm is located (its proximity area, which may change if the firm relocates), as well as on the reputation of current and former employees. Employer branding is thus a holistic concept involving direct (OC, CS, CR, RS) and indirect (EC, PA, RCE, RFE) factors. The above is a rationale for guiding SMEs along the Employer Branding development process.

The results seem to show the importance of employer branding for talent retention and employee loyalty. From an interdisciplinary perspective, the manuscript presents insights for marketing (digital marketing and employer branding) and for socially responsible behavior by organizations (in a Portuguese context).

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